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Should Wildlife Trapping Have a Place in a Christian Environmental Ethic?

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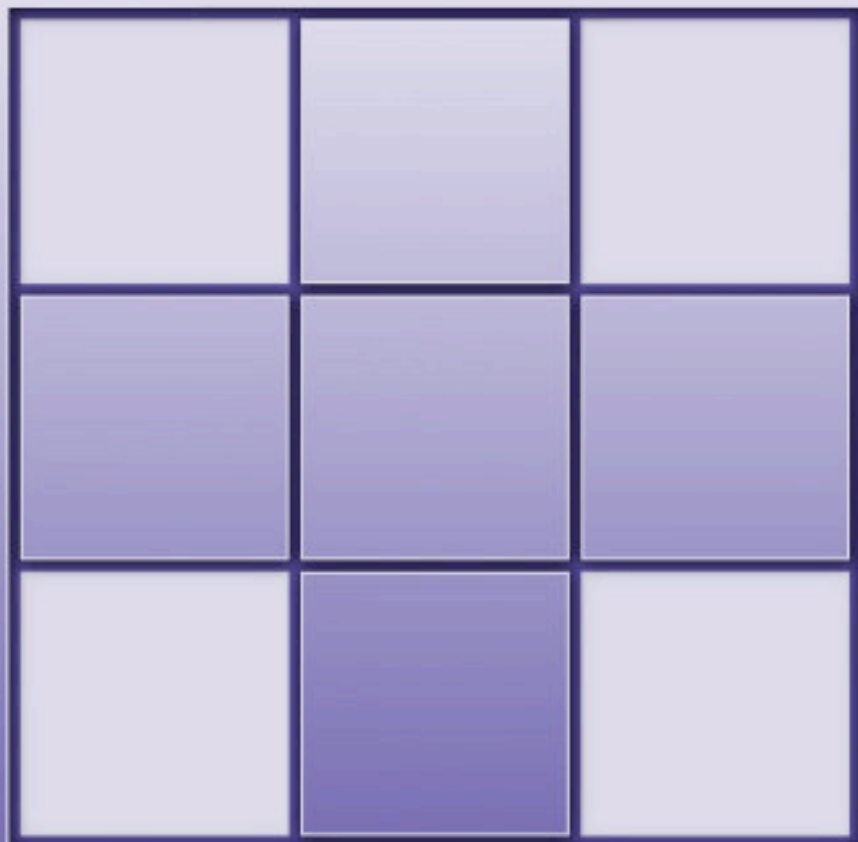
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The Evangelical Review of Society and Politics is an international peer-reviewed journal exploring social and political issues from an interdisciplinary Evangelical perspective. The purpose of the journal is to bring an international and scholarly Evangelical analysis to bear upon various social and political issues of national and international interest. The Editors are committed to presenting the full spectrum of Evangelical thought to provide readers (whether Evangelical or those analysing Evangelical phenomena) with thoughtful, scholarly debate and original research that is biblically based and theologically sound. Scholarly submissions that are suitably respectful of the Evangelical tradition are invited from across the disciplinary spectrum.

Should Wildlife Trapping Have a Place in a Christian Environmental Ethic?

Stephen Vantassel

Key words: Animal rights, animal protection, environmental ethics, trapping, wildlife management

Abstract: Animal protectionist groups lobby for the banning of wildlife trapping because of its perceived cruelty and harm to the environment. This paper evaluates those claims and suggests that Christians carefully consider all the data before adopting an anti-trapping stance.

Historically, the Christianized West believed that humanity held a privileged position in the world.¹ The world was, either by design or by happenstance, for humans to use for their own needs and interests. However, during the 1960's, concern over the degradation of the environment raised questions about the truthfulness behind the traditional view. Rachel Carson's landmark book, *Silent Spring*, said that our environmental predicament flowed from our (foolhardy) desire to control nature. In her assessment, "The "control of nature" is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man."² Lynn White Jr. laid the majority of the blame for our damaged environment³ on the shoulders of Western Christianity's doctrine of human dominion.⁴ Armed with this ammunition, "Deep Ecologists"⁵, argued that the solution to our

¹ This perspective, derived from Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15 and Psalm 8, is known as the "Dominion Mandate."

² Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1962, 1968). 261.

³ One cannot overemphasize the apocalyptic predictions of environmental futurists. The following book provides an excellent example as it predicts catastrophe in 2040, a year called "Despair." Anita Gordon and David Suzuki, *It's a Matter of Survival* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). 7. As expected, the authors cited Biblical values as a key reason for the coming catastrophe. pp. 53, 235-6.

⁴ Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* New Series 155, no. 3767 (1967). 1205. See also Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing Foundations for Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1990). 5. Laurel Kearns, "Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States," *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 1 (1996). 55. Kirsten Bouthier, "Religious Leaders Weigh in on Responsibility toward Environment," *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*, June 18, 2005., and Fox. 5f. For a critique of White's assessment read Richard T. Wright, "Responsibility for the Ecological Crisis," *BioScience* 20 (1970). 851-853.

⁵ Deep ecology believes that "...natural areas must be preserved, not for utilitarian value but for their intrinsic value." Edward R. Wells and Alan M. Schwartz, "Deep Ecology," in

environmental problems⁶ begins by reorienting humanity's relationship with the environment, i.e. humans must jettison their anthropocentric stance toward nature and acknowledge that their interests are no more important or valuable than those of non-human creation. Humans, therefore, ought to reject their desire for control over any part of the natural world.⁷

Christians have not been immune to these ideological currents. Despite the lack of attention given to environmental issues among Evangelical theologians,⁸ interest is growing.⁹ One group of animal protectionists,¹⁰ known as Christian Animal Rights activists (CAR), assert that Scripture and science require us to protect animals from harm stemming from human behavior.¹¹ They contend that God's original creation was characterized by non-violent harmony between humans and animals. God never wanted humans to eat animal flesh or kill animals through hunting or trapping. Humanity's carnivorous behavior only began as a result of the Fall. Furthermore, since Christ reconciled "all things" (Col 1:18f), which would presumably include non-human creation, Christians must work for a peaceable kingdom that extends Christ's compassion to all of

Historical Dictionary of North American Environmentalism (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997). 61. Furthermore, our environmental problems can only be resolved by recognizing their global impact on all creatures. Humans must acknowledge that all creatures have intrinsic worth, not just humans. Steve Bishop, "Green Theology and Deep Ecology: New Age or New Creation?," *Themelios* 16, no. 3 (1991). 8-14.

⁶ Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005, 2006). Diamond, in chapter 16, outlines the major environmental issues facing the planet.

⁷ Richard T. Wright, "Tearing Down the Green: Environmental Backlash in the Evangelical Sub-Culture," in *PSCF* (1995). 80-91. Bishop. Bishop provides a worthy review of some of the various issues at stake.

⁸ John Jefferson Davis, "Ecological "Blind Spots" In the Structure and Content of Recent Evangelical Systematic Theologies," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 2 (2000). 273-286.

⁹ Cf. a recent statement on global warming. James Hansen and others, *Evangelicals and Scientists on Global Climate Change* (Forum for Religion and Ecology, 2007, viewed 07/23/07 <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/religion/christianity/statements/>). Kearns. 56. Jim Ball, "The Use of Ecology in the Evangelical Protestant Response to the Ecological Crisis," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 50, no. 1 (1998). 33.

¹⁰ Animal protectionist is a broad term that describes individuals and groups who wish to severely restrict human use of animals, including animal rights activists and strict animal welfarists. Animal rights activists believe that animals deserve rights comparable to those of humans, e.g. life, self-determination, etc. because they too are sentient beings. Animal welfarists believe that humans may kill and eat animals provided they are treated responsibly.

¹¹ The environmental aspect of the animal protectionist movement will be clearly apparent to anyone surfing environmental websites. Many will dedicate an area of their site to animal rights. However, it must be known that for some, animal rights is not strictly an environmental issue. Some would put more emphasis on a justice or ethical view of how fellow beings should be treated, whether or not there was an environmental benefit to such treatment.

Creation. Therefore, Christians must stop killing and eating animals,¹² and work for the adoption of rights for animals.¹³ In addition, these Christians suggest that an animal protectionist stance is more environmentally sound. It is alleged that if humans would stop killing animals the earth would become a better place to live.

The CAR activists' rejection of the Church's traditional understanding of human dominion¹⁴ has far reaching implications. Is it morally and environmentally wrong for Christians to trap wildlife? Trapping differs from hunting in that a device allows the trapper to take an animal without having to be present.¹⁵ The subject of trapping may appear to be far removed from the important issues confronting Christian environmental theory. However, this writer believes that as abortion is a bell-weather issue regarding one's views on the sanctity of life, so trapping helps us refine our positions regarding environmental ethics and policy. Trapping, particularly since the development of the foothold trap,¹⁶ has been the subject of intense controversy.¹⁷ Trapping places questions of the extent of human dominion in stark relief. It is arguably the most difficult of all the consumptive wildlife activities (such as hunting and fishing) to defend due to the perception that trapping is cruel.¹⁸ Finally, trapping has been

¹² Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Avon Publishers, 1975, 1977). And "Fur is Dead", "Fur-A Killer Look", and "Fur Hurts". These slogans can be found at the web site administered by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. <http://www.peta.org> accessed on July, 27, 2007.

¹³ Andrew Linzey, *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment of Man's Treatment of Animals* (London: SCM Press, LTD, 1976). CAR views are gaining in popularity. Google.com search using the key words/phrase: "Christianity + 'Animal Rights'" on 11/23/02 yielded 13,600 hits. But the same search performed on 04/16/07 yielded 417,000 hits. "Google Search Engine," (Google Inc., 2007).

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Summa Theologica on Cd-Rom*, trans. English Dominican Friars, CD-ROM ed. (Salem, OR: Harmony Media Inc., 1998).

¹⁵ Cf. Cartmill's definition of hunting. Matt Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, 1996), 29-30.

¹⁶ The trap is also known as a leg-hold. It is preferable to call it a foot-hold because trappers seek to catch the animal on the pad of the foot rather than on the less muscular leg where the bones may be broken. A quick look at one's own anatomy will quickly demonstrate why this is important. Compare the difference between the toughness of the palm of your hand with the toughness of your forearm. Charles Darwin, "Trapping Agony," *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette*, August 1863, 1980.

¹⁷ Donna L. Minnis, "Wildlife Policy-Making by the Electorate: An Overview of Citizen-Sponsored Ballot Measures on Hunting and Trapping," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 26, no. 1 (1998), 75-83. Minnis provides a review of some of the politics of wildlife management which have occurred in the U.S in recent years.

¹⁸ Cf. William D. Fitzwater, "Trapping - the Oldest Profession," in *Vertebrate Pest Conference* ed. Richard H. Dana, Proceedings of the Fourth Vertebrate Pest Conference (West Sacramento, CA: California Vertebrate Pest Committee, 1970), 106. Even Plato derided trapping as "slothful." Cartmill, 32.

the subject of political activism¹⁹ by animal protectionist groups seeking to restrict and/or ban trapping altogether.²⁰ Thus, by discussing trapping, we avoid creating a straw-man of the CAR position, while dealing with a concrete ethical issue of contemporary significance facing Christians interested in environmental ethics.²¹

Before reviewing the evidence, we must distinguish different types of trapping. Trapping is not a monolithic activity as trapping occurs for different reasons. "Consumptive trapping" involves the capturing of animals deemed desirable for their fur, meat, or products. This type of trapping normally results in the death of the animal, but live-captures for zoos or pet markets do occur. Fur-trapping is a specific kind of consumptive trapping in that the primary goal is to capture animals considered valuable for their pelt rather than for their meat or to resolve a predation issue.²² "Control trapping" designates the capture and removal of animals considered dangerous or causing disturbance to human or other interests, such as troublesome house mice (*Mus musculus*) or invasive species. As with consumptive trapping, control trapping frequently results in the death of the offending animal.²³ "Research trapping" refers to the capture of animals for study or population surveys. Since CAR activists focus their opposition on consumptive trapping and on control trapping, this paper will do likewise.

Trapping is a complex issue covering a variety of tools, techniques, and species. The sheer breadth of data can overwhelm the non-professional. So to help make the subject manageable, the debate over consumptive trapping will be

¹⁹ A brief overview of animal protectionist legislation in the United States and around the world see Andrew N. Rowan and Beth Rosen, "Progress in Animal Legislation: Measurement and Assessment," in *State of the Animals Iii: 2005*, ed. Deborah J. Salem and Andrew N. Rowan (Washington D.C.: Humane Society Press, 2005). And Paul G. Irwin, "A Strategic Review of International Animal Protection," in *The State of Animals Ii: 2003*, ed. Deborah J. Salem and Andrew N. Rowan (Washington D.C.: Humane Society Press, 2003).

²⁰ Animal protectionists are not always clear about their ultimate goals.

²¹ The author believes Christian environmental thinking must move beyond simplistic sloganeering or vacuous platitudes and provide concrete answers on the extent of human dominion. See Bouthier.; Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth without Worshiping Nature* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc. , 1992). 70. Calvin B. DeWitt, *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988). See also Evangelical Environmental Network, *Frequently Asked Questions* (EEN, 2007, viewed 08/15/2007; available from <http://www.creationcare.org/responses/faq.php>).

²² John F. Organ and others, *Trapping and Furbearer Management in North American Wildlife Conservation* (No city given: The Northeast Furbearer Resources Technical Committee, 2001). 2. It should also be noted that trappers have found other uses for these animals, including using them for meat and lure making (see p. 1 and 8).

²³ Translocation of the problem animal is one such exception. For the potential negative impacts to translocated animals see Dirk Van Vuren and others, "Translocation as a Nonlethal Alternative for Managing California Ground Squirrels," *Journal of Wildlife Management* 61, no. 2 (1997). 351.

discussed in more general terms. However, since control trapping is decidedly more concrete and specific, the author has chosen to evaluate CAR's opposition to coyote (*Canis latrans*) trapping for simplicity.²⁴

As noted above, CAR activists believe that trapping or any killing of animals, except to save human life, is immoral. They ground this belief in their reading of Scripture and their understanding of the environmental evidence. This author believes that the CAR activists are mistaken on both counts. Since a critique of their Biblical argument has already been written, it will be only summarized here.²⁵

First, the CAR position mischaracterizes Scripture's description of humanity's role in creation. CAR activists love to talk about how humans must tend and keep the garden but downplay our right and need to partake of the garden. In other words, God permits people to enjoy the fruits of their labor. CAR activists correctly state that humanity's dominion should be characterized by stewardship. But they forget that responsible stewardship may involve culling and forceful imposition as denoted by words "rule" *radah*²⁶ and "subdue" *kabosh*.²⁷ God's allowance of coercive dominion makes Adam and Eve's failure to evict or even kill the Serpent even more egregious.²⁸ Furthermore, even conceding the view that pre-fallen humans were exclusively vegetarian, the question regarding their need to protect the garden from animals seeking to partake of the garden's produce remains.²⁹ Even if the Fall never occurred, competition between human and animal interests would have had to take place eventually given the finitude of the earth's available resources.³⁰ Second, the CAR view improperly diminishes the differences between humans and other sentient creatures. It is true that humans have many similarities with animals, such as being souls (*nephesh*) and

²⁴ By such a limitation, the author engages animal protectionist arguments at their strongest point as land trapping results in greater injury potential than water trapping where drowning sets can be employed.

²⁵ Stephen Vantassel, "A Biblical View of Animals: A Critical Response to the Theology of Andrew Linzey," *Emmaus Journal* 12 (2003). 177-195.

²⁶ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, vol. 1. *The Pentateuch*, Trans. James Martin, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 152, suggest that man's original rule was less forceful than after Genesis 9:1-7 because prior to the fall animals served willingly. Their view could be correct. But it is also possible that God wanted animals to fear humans for their own survival. Otherwise wouldn't these same animals have been imprinted not to fear humans?

²⁷ Cf. John N. Oswalt article "KABASH" ed. R. Laird Harris et. al, *TWOT* vol. 1 p. 430. with Robert D. Culver, "MASHAL III" pp. 534-5. (same volume). It is significant that *mashal* was a lexical option, but not chosen by the writer of Genesis.

²⁸ I wish to thank Dr. Meredith Kline for the inspiration for this argument.

²⁹ This writer is open to Moltmann's identification of humanity's role as "justices of the peace" provided that we have the power of the sword (Rom 13:4). Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985). 188.

³⁰ To suggest otherwise requires one to postulate such a fantastic set of circumstances that one wonders how to respond.

having bodies. However, Genesis 1-2 clearly shows that humanity stands at the apex of creation. Humanity alone is "in the image of God,"³¹ (see also Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jms 3:9); a phrase that emphasizes the importance of humans.³² Humanity's significance is underscored by God's having an interactive and communicative relationship with individual humanity; a reality that does not exist with animals. In light of humanity's privileged position, it is perfectly legitimate to understand that humans have authority over creation and animals. Third, CAR undercuts the doctrine of the atonement by denying that God commanded animal sacrifices or that Christ was the lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).³³ Finally, if killing or harming animals is wrong or not God's perfect will, then Christ's perfection is in doubt (Heb 9:14) as he was directly and indirectly involved in the infliction of death and suffering upon animals.³⁴

Unfortunately, proving that CAR activists are mistaken on their understanding of human-animal relations does not necessarily translate into support for trapping. CAR activists assert that trapping must be condemned by Christians because of its cruelty and threat to ecosystems.³⁵ In other words, CAR activists believe that Christians should refrain from trapping or severely limit their trapping activities on the basis that trapping violates God's requirement that humans protect His creation. Humans, even as subordinate lords over creation, cannot use their position and power as unrestricted license (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23).

Since CAR activists employ scientific arguments to support their view that trapping constitutes a violation of our requirement to "care for creation", the remainder of this paper will evaluate the validity of these arguments.

³¹ I take my comments here as a mere truism. Even a brief search of any theological library will present a researcher with a wealth of writing trying to explain the meaning of the phrase "image of God". See *HALOT* for support of this understanding. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner subsequently revised By Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm et.al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Translated And Edited M.E.J. Richardson (Leiden, The Netherlands:BRILL, 1994-2000) CD-ROM Edition entry 8011.

³² The point being that despite humanity's similarities with animals, humanity holds a unique position in creation.

³³ Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology*, (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994,1995),110. For a brief summary of the difficulty CARs have with animal sacrifice see Andrew Linzey and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1997). 5-6.

³⁴ Mt 8:32; 17:27; 21:1-5; Lk 5:4-6; Lk 5:14//Lev 14:30ff; Cf. Lk 5:33 where Christ is accused of letting his disciples eat well, which probably involved abundant meat consumption.

³⁵ Richard Gerstell, *The Steel Trap in North America* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1985).303f. Gerstell is quite right that the basic arguments against trapping have not changed. See also HSUS, *Trapping: The inside Story* [PDF] (The Humane Society of the United States, 1998), viewed 07/23/2007 at www.hsus.org/furfree/cruel_reality/trapping/. and Andrew Linzey, "A Reply to the Bishops," in *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (New York: Crossroad, 1988). 170-173.

TRAPPING AS UNDULY CRUEL

CAR activists³⁶ assert that trapping constitutes an unacceptable level of pain and suffering³⁷ that when coupled with other negative aspects of trapping becomes an unacceptable form of wildlife management. In other words, the cruelty alleged to be inflicted by trapping, particularly the steel-trap, is so gratuitous that any of its environmental benefits are outweighed by its deficits.

The evidence for this argument³⁸ can be found in *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States*³⁹ (hereafter COTW) and *Facts about Furs*⁴⁰ (hereafter, FAF). These texts employed several categories to express the comprehensive nature of the suffering inflicted by trapping. First, they condemn the trappers' equipment as barbaric and excessively cruel. Foothold traps⁴¹ are especially hated because animals caught in these traps suffer shoulder dislocations, cuts, bruises, swelling, broken bones,⁴² tooth damage, and "wring off" (also known as a "chew out") in their struggle to free themselves before the trapper's return.⁴³ 'Wring offs' occur when the animal's leg breaks at the joint. As the animal struggles and/or gnaws at the broken limb, ligaments are twisted till they sever, allowing the animal to escape. The resultant

³⁶ It should be noted that CAR activists simply refer to the arguments against trapping presented by other animal protectionists.

³⁷ In the ethical version of the argument from cruelty, animal activists argue that humans have no more right to inflict suffering or pain on a sentient being, such as a raccoon, than they would have a right to inflict pain on a mentally retarded child. For a detailed discussion of the Argument from Marginal Cases read Evelyn B. Pluhar, *Beyond Prejudice: The Moral Significance of Human and Nonhuman Animals* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). 1-123.

³⁸ Animal Welfare Institute, *Aims* (Animal Welfare Institute, 2007, accessed April 14 2007); available from <http://www.awionline.org/aims.htm>. Their mission is "...to reduce the sum total of pain and fear inflicted on animals by humans."

³⁹ Camilla H. Fox and Christopher M. Papouchis, eds., *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States* (Sacramento, CA: Animal Protection Institute, 2004).

⁴⁰ Greta Nilsson & others, *Facts About Furs*, Third ed. (Washington D.C.: Animal Welfare Institute, 1980). Andrew Linzey cites the 1973 edition. However, this writer will be using the 1980 edition. Nilsson and others.

⁴¹ The foothold is a steel trap which employs two half moon jaws which close on the appendage which depresses the trigger; thereby holding the animal by that appendage. Nilsson and others. Pages 128-9 actually explain the physics behind the damage.

⁴² Ibid. 86. See also Christopher M. Papouchis, "A Critical Review of Trap Research," in *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States*, ed. Camilla H. Fox and Christopher M. Papouchis (Sacramento, CA: Animal Protection Institute, 2004). 41.

⁴³ In the United States, most trappers are required to check their traps anywhere from daily to every 48 or 72 hours depending on the situation and the laws of one's state. Fox and Papouchis, eds., *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States*. 76.

wound puts the animal at risk for infection and possible death. While the amount of pain involved and the number of animals affected is disputed,⁴⁴ these events have occurred and to some extent still occur, but hard data is lacking.⁴⁵

The second part of the argument from cruelty asserts that traps are not selective, thereby injuring/killing many non-target animals.⁴⁶ Just as human rights advocates would be outraged by police rounding up people without any real evidence of guilt, so the animal protectionists argue that traps injure many animals that trappers did not seek. Without verifiable data, the *COTW* estimated that 5 million non-target animals may be captured in the U.S. each year.⁴⁷ The *FAF* cited an Australian study that found that 95% of all the trapped animals were non-target and also a U.S. survey that revealed 67% of captures were non-target.⁴⁸ Trapping, therefore, is the moral equivalent of using a 1000 pound bomb to kill a fly. It just doesn't meet the proportionality standard in that too many "innocent" animals become injured in the trappers' quest of their quarry.

In light of these remarkable claims, one may wonder how Christians could support trapping with devices that inflict so much pain on target and non-target animals alike. Trapping so described appears to be the height of environmental mismanagement and abuse of our stewardship role. Although these books make many true statements,⁴⁹ they fail to provide the full context for those facts.

In regards to the first part of the argument from suffering, it should be said that trappers do not wish for "wring outs", as they represent a lost capture.

⁴⁴ Nilsson and others. 89-90. *FAF* mentions that fur trappers claims that traps in the hands of experienced trappers do not cause animals to suffer. The distinction between pain and suffering relates to differences of opinion about the mental and psychological status of animals. Trappers claim that wild animals have a higher tolerance for pain and therefore a properly set and maintained foothold does not cause an animal enduring agony.

⁴⁵ It is perfectly understandable that solid statistics are essentially unavailable. People tend not to publicize their failures and trappers are no different. See the following publications for some indication as to the scope of the problem. Thomas Z. Atkeson, "Incidence of Crippling Loss in Steel Trapping," *The Journal of Wildlife Management* 20, no. 3 (1956). 324. HSUS, (accessed). 1. Their fact sheet says that one study found that 29% of all raccoons chewed or twisted off their limb to escape.

⁴⁶ Camilla H. Fox and Christopher M. Papouchis, *Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore*, ed. Karen Hirsch and Gil Lamont (Sacramento, CA: Animal Protection Institute, 2005). 16. For a more detailed listing of stats see Camilla H. Fox and Christopher M. Papouchis, "Refuting the Myths," in *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States*, ed. Camilla H. Fox and Christopher M. Papouchis (Sacramento, CA: Animal Protection Institute, 2004). 25.

⁴⁷ Camilla H. Fox, "Trapping in North America. A Historical Overview," in *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States*, ed. Camilla H. Fox and Christopher M. Papouchis (Sacramento, CA: Animal Protection Institute, 2004). 2.

⁴⁸ Nilsson and others. 90.

⁴⁹ This comment should not be taken to mean that the author necessarily agrees with all their statistics (e.g. the non-target capture statistics are highly debatable).

Furthermore, while not denying that traps can cause pain and injury,⁵⁰ trappers are not sadists. The question, however, is how much pain may Christians morally inflict in the process of capturing free-range animals? It is critical to be careful here as your answer will impact on your moral evaluation of Christ's miracle of the fishes (see Lk 5). Furthermore, should we consider the pain of the individual animal caught in the trap in isolation or in light of the benefits achieved through compensatory culling?⁵¹ To assert that a particular capture method is unduly painful, one must have another option against which to compare it.⁵² This author would caution readers to diligently inquire about the standard employed by animal protectionists. Many of them consider all injuries sustained during an animal's capture, no matter how slight, as providing sufficient grounds to designate the method as cruel. For example, most animal protectionists will argue that the mere death of the animal (unless to end suffering not induced by humans) is by definition cruel, as the animal will have lost its expectation of life. Yet, loss of life is not what is generally understood as constituting cruelty in regards to animals.⁵³ This radical understanding of suffering caused one fur-trapper to remark that animal protectionists would not be happy even if we trapped and killed the animals with "sweet dreams and tender kisses." The animal protectionist argument only has force if it is wrong to trap an animal at all.⁵⁴

If humans can morally trap and kill animals as long as it is performed properly, then what standard should be used to define what is "proper"? Reynolds⁵⁵ explains that the present standard, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis (which is a blood test of hormones believed to signify stress levels) has limitations.⁵⁶ If we rely on physical injury tests, as is done with Best Management Practices,⁵⁷ how much value should we place on the significance of

⁵⁰ Unless one is a follower of Rene Descartes who believed that animals were mere machines, the author takes this point as assumed. Rene Descartes, "Animals Are Machines," in *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1988). 46. Where Descartes likens animals to "automata."

⁵¹ JC Reynolds, "Trade-Offs between Welfare, Conservation, Utility and Economics in Wildlife Management--a Review of Conflicts, Compromises and Regulation," *Animal Welfare* 13 (2004). S134.

⁵² Other elements of trapping methods must also be considered, such as safety for the trapper and other persons, selectivity, practicality, and cost effectiveness.

⁵³ Otherwise meat-eaters would be cruel by definition.

⁵⁴ Which is why animal protectionists spend so much energy trying to convince readers that so called "non-lethal" techniques work to stop wildlife damage. Cf. Fox and Papouchis, *Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore*. 21-29. My point here is simply to show that these arguments only have force if one asserts that wildlife can only be regarded as a pest or visual pleasure rather than a resource to be responsibly harvested.

⁵⁵ Reynolds. S134.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ For details about Best Management Practices see Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, *Best Management Practices* (Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, 2007,

animal's foot swelling, when the animal will be killed upon the trapper's arrival anyway? Nor would using cage traps necessarily solve the problem as the *FAF* considers them humane only if the trap is checked twice daily; a requirement that would dramatically reduces trapping cost-efficiency.⁵⁸

Consider other forms of capturing animals. How does one compare the suffering caused by trapping to the suffering inflicted by toxicants that cause death through internal injury and is thereby more difficult to quantify?⁵⁹ In the United States, Wildlife Services personnel may use M-44s to control coyotes. When a coyote bites and pulls on the M-44, sodium cyanide is injected into its mouth. Death often follows within 30 seconds to 5 minutes.⁶⁰ Is this device more or less humane than a foothold from the coyote's perspective? Should we factor in the potential risk to the person setting the device?⁶¹ The point being made is not to denigrate humane concerns. It is just to explain that the standard one employs in large measure predetermines the conclusion.

Turning to part 2 of the argument, readers should be reminded that trappers have a financial interest in capturing the right animal. Here, again the problem of definition comes into play. If a trap is set for a coyote, but catches a red fox, it could be legitimately said that the capture is a non-target. Yet non-target does not necessarily mean unwanted. It may not have been the exact species desired, but that does not necessarily mean that trapper cannot use the species. It is critical that Christians press animal protectionists for greater clarity in their use of terms.

Pets are by far the most emotionally charged non-target animal. Animal protectionists gain a great deal of political capital when pets become trapped, due to the intense media coverage responding to the shock of a pet idolizing public.⁶²

accessed August 5, 2007); available from http://www.fishwildlife.org/furbearer_bmp.html. Also Camilla H. Fox, "The Development of International Trapping Standards," in *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Trapping in the United States*, ed. Camilla H. Fox and Christopher M. Papouchis (Sacramento, CA: Animal Protection Institute, 2004). 66-8

⁵⁸ Nilsson and others. 105.

⁵⁹ It is ironic how many people hate trapping but will easily employ poison in a clear example of out of sight-out of mind thinking.

⁶⁰ Fox and Papouchis, *Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore*. 16.

⁶¹ Ibid. 16. Authors note that 20 people have been injured by the device between 1983-1999.

⁶² Fox and Papouchis, "Refuting the Myths." 25. Note the image of a house cat caught in a #2 or possibly #3 double longspring foothold to further accentuate the authors' point. The image came from http://www.banlegholdtraps.com/trap_parent.htm and the site does not claim all its images are authentic. This writer suspects that this particular cat-in-trap-photo is staged. On pet statistics see 2002 U.S. Pet Ownership and Demographic Sourcebook, *U.S. Pet Ownership* [Web page] (AVMA, 2007 2002, accessed 03/13 2007); available from <http://www.avma.org/reference/marketstats/ownership.asp>. No one denies that pet ownership brings joy to many people. According to the 2002 U.S. Pet Ownership Resource Book, American's own 132 million dogs and cats. This number is actually low as it does not include birds, horses or exotic pets. The same source stated that the average veterinary cost per animal amounted to \$ 178.50 for dogs and \$84.60 per year. Include other financial

One survey found that individuals were motivated to work for trap bans because of a pet that was injured or killed in a trap.⁶³ Yet in all the outrage and finger pointing that occurs when pets are trapped, two questions are rarely asked. “Was the trap legally set?” and “Was the pet on a leash?”⁶⁴ These two questions are not asked because owners see their pets as extensions of the family with essentially equal rights and privileges. Owners bristle against any restrictions on their pet’s rights and freedoms. Like naïve and doting parents, pet owners rarely even consider the possibility that their pet may have done something wrong. According to the Centers for Disease Control, each year, more than 4.7 million people sustain dog bites, with 800,000 seeking medical attention. Almost half of those seeking medical attention require treatment in an emergency department and about a dozen die.⁶⁵ We have not even mentioned how free-roaming dogs can attack livestock. House cats pose disease risks to humans and are a significant threat to the environment, a fact frequently overlooked.⁶⁶ Granted pet owner misbehavior does not make trapping right, but the point being made here is that free-roaming pets also negatively impact the environment. The public policy question becomes, “If trappers bear responsibility for catching free-roaming pets (all of which aren’t even injured), what responsibility do owners have for the negative effects of their pets’ actions?” It is essentially an issue of distributive justice rather than relying on the tyranny of the polls. This writer would suggest that the reason legislators ban traps stems from their awareness that trappers comprise such a small minority that such action will carry no negative political consequences.⁶⁷

More to the point, a critical failure of the entire argument from cruelty lay with its excessive preoccupation with the trap.⁶⁸ Animal protectionists talk about

costs such as feeding and time lost due to care for these animals, and the economic impact of pet ownership reaches into the billions of dollars. Christians should think about the amount of money and attention spent on pets in light of other pressing needs.

⁶³ Susan Cockrell, “Crusader Activists and the 1996 Anti-Trapping Campaign,” *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 27, no. 1 (1999). 70.

⁶⁴ State Senator Carol Hudkins, “Prohibit the Trapping of Wildlife in County Road Rights-of-Way,” ed. Nebraska State Legislature (Nebraska State Legislature, 2007). And personal knowledge. Christians should ask a third question namely, whether the rise in the status of pets to family member, as denoted by the term “companion animal”, is an appropriate attitude for a Biblical Christian.

⁶⁵ Centers for Disease Control, *National Dog Bite Prevention Week* (Department of Health and Human Services, circa 1999, accessed August 4, 2007); available from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/biteprevention.htm>.

⁶⁶ For publications about the impact of free-roaming cats both for and against, visit <http://www.icwdm.org/wildlife/housecat.asp>

⁶⁷ According to Fox and Papouchis, eds., *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States*. vii. less than 1/10 of 1% of the U.S. population traps for profit or recreation.

⁶⁸ Fox and Papouchis, “Refuting the Myths.” 28. Ms. Fox does note that 81% of trappers surveyed said they had learned their skills through “trial and error.”

the foothold as if it only had only one design.⁶⁹ Their use of the term “foothold” is comparable to one saying that all vehicles pose the same risks of injury to their occupants as all the others. However, just as there are different kinds of cars, with differing safety standards, so there are different kinds of footholds with different injury rates. Footholds not only have different jaw spreads, and spring tension, they also have different versions such as off-set, double jaw, toothed-jaw, laminated, padded, and more. All footholds are not the same nor do they injure animals in equal measure.⁷⁰

The second problem with the argument against traps is the unstated assumption that technology improvement or an equipment ban holds the answer. In this regard, the animal protectionist perspective echoes that of the anti-gun lobby which directs its anger at an inanimate object rather than the morally responsible operator. Certainly in political terms, it is easier to regulate devices than behavior, so this may be part of the animal activist strategy. Yet, their rhetoric repeatedly ignores that trapping involves the trapper-trap connection. Traps do not set themselves.⁷¹ The trapper’s skill in placement, choice, modification, and set construction (i.e. baiting) plays an important role in reducing injuries and non-target captures. For example, coyote trappers can reduce the risk of capturing free-roaming house cats, by simply increasing the tension need to spring the trap.⁷² Trapping injuries can be addressed by reducing trap check times⁷³ or using different traps noted below. While one suspects that animal protectionist standards are so high as to present insurmountable difficulties for a humane fur-trade (on their definition), it is worth noting that progress has been made.⁷⁴ It is regrettable that every state does not require trapper

⁶⁹ See Cathy Liss’s Foreword on page 1 in Tom Garrett, *Alternative Traps: The Role of Cage and Box Traps in Modern Trapping, the Role of Spring-Powered Killing Traps in Modern Trapping, and the Role of Legsnare in Modern Trapping*, Revised edition ed. (Washington, DC: Animal Welfare Institute, 1999).

⁷⁰ Padded-jaw footholds have done remarkably well in reducing animal injuries see John A. Shivik and others, "Initial Comparison: Jaws, Cables, and Cage-Traps to Capture Coyotes," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 33, no. 4 (2005). 1381. See also Papouchis.

⁷¹ Animal protectionists regularly speak of traps “doing things”. See Garrett. 17. “Interestingly, while the steel trap brought the beaver to near extinction,...” Clearly readers should know that the trap did not cause beaver populations decline. Trappers who used the trap did that as Garrett says earlier. My point is that this sort of confused speaking has a big impact in the political arena.

⁷² A fact noted in "Trapping Devices, Methods, and Research," in *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States*, ed. Camilla H. Fox and Christopher M. Papouchis (Sacramento, CA: Animal Protection Institute, 2004). 34.

⁷³ For trap check requirements see Camilla H. Fox, "State Trapping Regulations," in *Cull of the Wild: A Contemporary Analysis of Wildlife Trapping in the United States*, ed. Camilla H. Fox and Christopher M. Papouchis (Sacramento, CA: Animal Protection Institute, 2004).

⁷⁴ The author concedes that improvements in the humanness of traps has been stimulated by the trapping industry’s attempt to blunt the political force of the animal protectionists.

education, given that many trappers still learn by “trial and error.”⁷⁵ However, *COTW* painted too bleak a picture. Thankfully, a great deal of trapper education opportunities are available to those willing to seek it out, including, field training, periodicals, books, and online bulletin boards.⁷⁶ While this author strongly recommends trapper education, the fact is there are limits to what can be taught in a classroom setting. Trapping is like legal work, it takes practice. Even experienced trappers regularly admit that the animals teach them new things all the time.

Animal activists also fail to remind the public that the problems of pain/suffering and injuries to non-targets are not exclusively the domain of footholds. Box and cage traps⁷⁷ (mistakenly called live-traps)⁷⁸ are cited as causing trapped animals to suffer through physical injury.⁷⁹ Additionally, beavers captured in the Bailey Live Trap[®] during the winter can suffer hypothermia because the trap keeps them in the cold water a fact not mentioned in the *COTW*.⁸⁰ One study on river otters concluded that padded-jaw foothold traps were preferable to the Hancock cage trap because foothold trapped otters were less likely to break their teeth.⁸¹ Readers may be surprised to learn that the much maligned foothold has actually been involved in a wildly successful river

Ideally, trappers should have worked to improve their techniques out of respect for God and the animal kingdom.

⁷⁵ For progress on a variety of species see Gilbert Proulx, ed., *Mammal Trapping* (Sherwood Park, Alberta: Alpha Wildlife Research & Management Ltd., 1999). Fox and Papouchis, "Refuting the Myths." 28.

⁷⁶ The author is personally aware of the existence of these, and other, educational opportunities for trapper training.

⁷⁷ Box traps are enclosure devices with solid walls. Cage traps are enclosure devices with wire mesh walls.

⁷⁸ Cf. "Trapping Devices, Methods, and Research." 34. The animal protectionists have made great headway exploiting the term live-trap as a synonym for cage traps. The persistent use of this highly emotive term has successfully ingrained in the public mind that all other traps by definition kill and are thus inhumane. The fact is footholds, snares, and other restraint devices also capture animals "alive."

⁷⁹ See Garrett. 7. Even the anti-foothold AVMA recognizes that achieving euthanasia standards in the field pose many practical challenges. American Veterinary Medical Association, *Avma Guidelines on Euthanasia (Formerly Report of the Avma Panel on Euthanasia)* (Schaumburg, IL: American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007). 18-19.

⁸⁰ "Trapping Devices, Methods, and Research." 39. For information on hypothermia in beavers caught in a Bailey Live Trap see Stephen Vantassel, "The Bailey Beaver Trap: Modifications and Sets to Improve Capture Rate," in *Proceedings of the 22nd Vertebrate Pest Conference*, ed. Robert M. Timm and J. M. O'Brien (Davis, CA: University of California, 2006). 173.

⁸¹ Gail M. Blundell and others, "Capturing River Otters: A Comparison of Hancock and Leg-Hold Traps," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 27, no. 1 (1999). 190. Otters, being predators, rely on their teeth to capture and masticate their prey. Since their teeth do not grow back when damaged, tooth loss would have a major impact on their quality of life.

otter reintroduction program to much of their native range in the United States.⁸² In regards to coyotes, cage traps are not effective.⁸³ To deny trappers access to traps other than cage or box traps is to essentially deny their ability to trap coyotes.

A more realistic view of trapping is to recognize the trap and the trapper work in combination. To put it numerically, we could describe the relationship as an equation, trap choice minus trapper skill=suffering (8-4=4). Improved trap design would mean that the suffering associated with the trap would be lower to begin with. Couple the trap with an improved skill of the trapper and the suffering number can be low indeed (7-5=2). Just as automobiles have become safer, the fact remains that driver behavior remains the number one cause of accidents and injuries. Fortunately, advances in trap design have been made. Research performed by Shivak, DeLiberto and others demonstrated that newer devices, may reduce injury.⁸⁴ The Belisle® Footsnare⁸⁵ has achieved the humane requirements of the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards (AIHTS) for lynx, coyote and bobcat. Another cable restraint trap, called The Collarum,[®] captures coyotes by throwing a self-loosening cable around the coyote's neck and boasts a 100% target capture rate. In other words, during field studies, the trap never caught anything but a coyote. In further testimony of the trap's humaneness, animal control officers are using it to capture stray dogs.⁸⁶ While advances in technology that reduce human error are certainly welcome, the

⁸² Organ and others. 34. For a detailed history of the project see also Tom Krause, "Thank You, Mr. Sevin, Sir.," *American Trapper*, May-June 2001.

⁸³ Jonathan G. Way and others, "Box-Trapping Eastern Coyotes in Southeastern Massachusetts," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 30, no. 3 (2002). 695.

⁸⁴ Following information derives primarily from John A. Shivik, Kenneth S. Gruver, and Thomas J. DeLiberto, "Preliminary Evaluation of New Cable Restraints to Capture Coyotes," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 28, no. 3 (2000). And Shivik and others, "Initial Comparison: Jaws, Cables, and Cage-Traps to Capture Coyotes." Robert L. Phillips, Kenneth S. Gruver, and Elizabeth S. Williams, "Leg Injuries to Coyotes Captured in Three Types of Foothold Traps," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (1996). 262-3.

⁸⁵ [http://www.fur.ca/index-](http://www.fur.ca/index-e/trap_research/index.asp?action=trap_research&page=traps_certified_traps)

[e/trap_research/index.asp?action=trap_research&page=traps_certified_traps](http://www.fur.ca/index-e/trap_research/index.asp?action=trap_research&page=traps_certified_traps)

⁸⁶ Alan A. Huot, "Suitable and Effective Coyote Control Tools for the Urban/Suburban Setting" in *Proceedings of the Twelfth Wildlife Damage Management Conference*, ed. Robert Timm (Corpus Christi, TX: Wildlife Damage Management Working Group, Pending). Readers should be aware that the author has maintained a business relationship with Mr. Huot for a number of years.

fact is there are limits to where technology will take us.⁸⁷ Trapping wildlife is not a “one-size fits all.”⁸⁸

Animal protectionists are correct in noting that many trappers are reluctant to adopt less injurious technology.⁸⁹ What animal protectionists neglect to say is that trapper resistance stems from three different areas. The first is economic. Traps constitute a major investment, especially in light of lower fur prices in part due to animal protectionist’s efforts to change the social acceptance of wearing fur.⁹⁰ In this regard, trappers are no different than people who avoid replacing their gas guzzling cars with more efficient hybrids. Trappers also tend to be culturally conservative. Like farmers, trappers are reluctant to try new things because what they have works. Finally, a more intractable problem stems from trapper suspicion that the animal protectionists will never be satisfied with anything less than a total trap ban. Outsiders may dismiss such fears as groundless fear mongering. However, the legal actions taken by animal protectionist groups suggest the trappers’ concerns are not without warrant.⁹¹

TRAPPING AS BAD ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Trapping’s alleged deleterious effect on the environment constitutes the second line of argument employed by animal protectionists. Recall that animal protectionists by-in-large adopt a minimalist view of human intervention into the affairs of wildlife. While they recognize that humanity has a role to play in relation to animals, the guiding principle appears to be Albert Schweitzer’s “Reverence for Life Ethic.”⁹² They argue that humans should only kill wildlife with serious justification.⁹³ For many, serious justification would include protection of human life and species preservation as in overpopulation or threatened extinction.⁹⁴ They also encourage the employment of habitat

⁸⁷ Richard D. Earle and others, "Evaluating Injury Mitigation and Performance of #3 Victor Soft Catch ® Traps to Restrain Bobcats," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 31, no. 3 (2003). 625. Authors state, “It is difficult to design a footholding device that captures and holds a high percentage of any target species while maintaining low injury scores.” But farther down the authors explain that some traps do perform quite well in terms of performance, selectivity, and low injury scores for raccoon and opossum, such as Egg™ and Duffer™.

⁸⁸ All of the new trap designs have limitations. None are as versatile as the foothold.

⁸⁹ Papouchis. 41.

⁹⁰ Fox, "Trapping in North America. A Historical Overview." 4.

⁹¹ For example, study the question 1 ballot initiative vote which took place in Massachusetts in 1996. The author was personally involved in this controversy, including debates on radio and TV (Dan York Show out of Springfield MA. WHYN radio and Channel 22 NBC television) with one of the first 10 signatories of the ballot initiative, Peter Teraspulsy (Sept-Oct, 1996).

⁹² Linzey and Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology*. 104.

⁹³ Ibid. 105.

⁹⁴ Linzey makes this population claim based on his belief that humans have to manage their own population growth. His idea being if we have to do it then it is morally justified

restriction and modification as a means of wildlife damage control, as could be done through fencing or other forms of habitat modification.⁹⁵

Animal protectionists assert that the trapping industry and wildlife damage control programs (such as the USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services agency and private wildlife control companies) constitute the worst expression of environmental stewardship.⁹⁶ Here they strike at the strongest historic claims of the consumptive wildlife proponents, namely that trapping helps: 1. to keep nature in balance by removing surplus animals, 2. to resolve wildlife damage issues, such as livestock predation, and 3. to reduce the spread of zoonotic diseases.⁹⁷

Animal protectionists assert that nature is completely self-regulating.⁹⁸ When animal populations lack balance, nature automatically makes the necessary adjustments. Humans must learn to not interfere because they usually caused the imbalance in the first place. For example, animal protectionists argue that coyote trapping induces coyotes to disperse over greater distances (causing problems elsewhere). Furthermore, trapping increases coyote recruitment rates as the remaining adults can better feed their young.⁹⁹ Second, trapping fails to provide important environmental benefits because it has contributed to the extinction and/or threatened extinction of many species, such as the sea mink (extinct) and wolf (threatened).¹⁰⁰

As usual, animal protectionists raise some important issues, but issues separated from context and clear definitions only result in muddled thinking. First, when the wildlife managers speak of surplus animals they mean those animals that will die whether or not they are trapped. It is axiomatic that a habitat will only allow animals to survive that it can feed and house. The issue is whether trapping is additive to animal mortality, in which case reducing trapping pressure will result in higher animal numbers, or whether trapping is compensatory to animal mortality in which case reducing trapping pressure will have no effect on animal numbers. Different species have different mortality and fecundity rates and therefore respond to trapping pressure differently. This is why wildlife managers have different rules regarding season length and take limits. At issue is whether or not wildlife is considered a resource available for utilization. Since animal protectionists are disinclined to accept human utilization of wildlife, they

for us to require animals to do so. Sometimes we have to treat animals as groups. Linzey, *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment of Man's Treatment of Animals*. 38-9.

⁹⁵ Fox and Papouchis, "Refuting the Myths." 26. It should be noted that the effects on the ecosystem and the animals have not been properly studied nor have the potential impacts been considered by animal protectionists. Essentially, they assume these techniques are non-lethal as opposed to less-lethal.

⁹⁶ Linzey, *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment of Man's Treatment of Animals*. 38.

⁹⁷ For the following arguments see Fox and Papouchis, "Refuting the Myths." 25-27.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 25.

⁹⁹ Fox and Papouchis, *Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore*. 18-19.

¹⁰⁰ Nilsson and others. 162ff.

would answer that wildlife is not a resource. Therefore, it should not surprise us that, in their view, trapping does not constitute a viable wildlife management practice. However, from a resource perspective, the post-trapping rebound in coyote populations is not a negative event but actually a positive one for it insures coyote survival and opportunity for a good harvest the following season.

Second, animal protectionists know full well that in the modern United States, Canada, and Western Europe, regulated trapping is not a factor in wildlife extinction. In fact, the reverse is true. Sportsmen's fees have funded reintroduction programs of extirpated species. Agencies have used fur-trappers to remove predators threatening endangered species. The sportsmen's record has not always been perfect, but they have had a positive impact on preserving species.¹⁰¹

Animal protectionists cast a great deal of ire on the wildlife damage control programs, especially the work performed by USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services (hereafter WS) which has historically administered predator control programs in the U.S. For example, activists reject the idea that coyote control programs are needed to protect flocks from costly predation. Aside from the political issue of whether or not taxpayer funds should be spent on behalf of private businesses, animal activist criticism of WS has garnered support from advocacy groups strictly on environmental grounds. William Stolzenberg,¹⁰² in a recent article on WS' coyote control program, says that the agency simply kills too many non-targets. The idea being if the problem is coyotes, WS should avoid killing so many other animals. The problem is exacerbated by recent findings which have shown that not all coyotes kill sheep. Therefore, any control program that traps coyotes just for being coyotes rather than targeting problem coyotes seems to run counter to the arguments used to justify the program in the first place. No wonder that Stolzenberg says that little has changed since the landmark Leopold Report of 1964 condemning the WS predator management practices. Stolzenberg notes that this blanket war against coyotes has resulted in an explosion of ground predators, such as raccoons and skunks, which are responsible for attacking the nests of migratory birds.¹⁰³ So the argument is, if we are to protect the integrity of the environment we have to work towards protecting all species within the habitat. Finally, Stolzenberg rejects the idea that coyote predation has forced shepherds out of business.¹⁰⁴ In place of WS, animal protectionists hold up their work with sheep producers of Marin County, California as a better coyote management

¹⁰¹ David Baron, *The Beast in the Garden: A Modern Parable of Man and Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004). 32f. Baron notes the acreage set aside by hunting president Theodore Roosevelt and the pioneering work of Aldo Leopold, founder of the Wildlife Society.

¹⁰² William Stolzenburg, "Us or Them," *Conservation in Practice* 7, no. 4 (2006). 14-21.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 16. Fox and Papouchis, *Coyotes in Our Midst: Coexisting with an Adaptable and Resilient Carnivore*. 12. One study said that cattle losses to coyotes accounted for only 2.2% of all livestock losses. In a follow up study 5 years later the losses dropped to 0.15%.

model.¹⁰⁵ They claim that their use of various non-lethal control measures (although lethal control by property owners was not banned), such as prohibition of feeding coyotes, changes in husbandry practices, hazing of coyotes, guard animals, and fencing, resulted in a reduction in sheep losses.

At first glance, the claim that coyote trapping does not diminish livestock predation appears significant. Christian ethics would not support a policy that simply does not achieve the desired results. However, after a closer look at the data a different picture emerges. First, the trouble with averages is that not all ranchers suffer predation equally.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless assuming that all U.S. ranchers suffered only 0.15% losses to predation, why would this small amount require the conclusion that predator trapping is unnecessary?

Second, what about the problem of self-interest? It is easy for unaffected parties to diminish the significance of another's loss. What if we turned the question around and asked how one would react to a shoplifter who stole over the course of a year 0.15% of your assets? Should you give the shoplifter a pass simply because it is such a small amount? It is true that weather killed more cattle than coyotes. However, ranchers cannot control weather. So should they not work to diminish the losses that are within their control? What if we broaden the question to cover damage other than simply livestock predation? Conover¹⁰⁷ says that in a survey of 2 million agricultural producers, 24% said they had suffered damage from coyotes in the prior year 25% suffered raccoon damage, 9% suffered skunk damage. One can see that non-target captures are not always a true loss when considering that a landowner can suffer damage from multiple species.

Also, the Marin County experiment was not the glowing success the animal protectionists would like us to believe. Larson, in a review on the topic, provides several reasons why the data should be held in suspicion.¹⁰⁸ She explains that the county program instituted a compensation program to encourage ranchers to adopt the new (less-lethal) practices. Ranchers would receive \$500 for each of the four suggested practices adopted up to a total of \$2000 annually. Those who adopted at least 2 of the recommended practices would be compensated for any sheep losses. In her review of the reporting data, Larson observed that around the program's third year, the county had to limit the compensation provided to no more than 5% of the total flock. Such a limitation suggested to her that the program was not limiting the number of sheep losses. Second, Larson suspected that sheep losses were under-reported because only ranchers enrolled in the

¹⁰⁵ Camilla H. Fox, "Coyotes and Humans: Can We Coexist?," in *Proceedings of the 22nd Vertebrate Pest Conference*, ed. Robert M. Timm and J. M. O'Brien (Davis, CA: University of California-Davis, 2006).290-1.

¹⁰⁶ Stephanie Larson, "The Marin County Predator Management Program: Will It Save the Sheep Industry?," in *Proceedings of the 22nd Vertebrate Pest Conference*, ed. Robert M. Timm and J. M. O'Brien (Davis, California: University of California-Davis, 2007). 295.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Conover, *Resolving Human-Wildlife Conflicts: The Science of Wildlife Damage Management* (New York: Lewis Publishers, 2002). 104.

¹⁰⁸ Larson. 296-7.

county program would be motivated to report. She noted that one herder (not involved in the program) claimed to have lost 150 lambs annually in fiscal years 2003/04 and 2004/05, which was more than all the reported losses in the county program. Third, Larson said it was very likely that during the program's lifespan, ranchers may have been killing more coyotes on their own than were taken when WS field agents operated. Finally, she cautioned that any comparisons regarding control effectiveness between the programs is partly hindered by differences in data collection and the fact that WS at its height was responsible for controlling predation on 73,000 acres of land, which dwarfs the County program which never exceeded 10,275 acres in the past 5 years. In light of Larson's findings, it would seem clear that animal protectionists have not proven that trapping is an unnecessary component for effective predator management.

What about animal protectionist assertion that trapping is not necessary to mitigate wildlife disease epidemics, such as rabies?¹⁰⁹ If by rabies control, animal protectionists mean eliminate or drastically reduce the incidence of rabies in wildlife populations, then they are correct. Trapping, by itself, will not achieve that level of disease management. Ironically, to achieve that reduction in disease levels, trapping would have to reduce an animal population to threatened or endangered status. That would be similar to killing 5 of the 6 billion earth's human population to control the spread of the flu. This is why the CDC does not recommend wholesale, nationwide trapping to control rabies; it is not cost-effective. But as before, animal protectionists do not provide the entire picture. While broad scale trapping is not recommended for disease control, writers of the *Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control* recommended for use in targeted locations as explained in the following quote:

*However, limited control in high-contact areas (e.g., picnic grounds, camps, or suburban areas) may be indicated for the removal of selected high-risk species of wildlife.(9) The state wildlife agency and state health department should be consulted for coordination of any proposed vaccination or population-reduction programs.*¹¹⁰

The effectiveness of high intensity trapping in designated areas is also supported by others.¹¹¹ Rabies, being population density dependent, is vulnerable to population declines. The reason for this is due to the virus' terminal nature. In order for the virus to continue living, it must find another host before it kills its present one. The longer it takes to find another host, the less likely it will find a

¹⁰⁹ Nilsson and Others.157-160.

¹¹⁰ National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, Inc. "Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control, 2004," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* June 25, 2004. 53(RR09). 7-8.

¹¹¹ Cf. Jim D. Broadfoot, Richard C. Rosatte, and David T. O'Leary, "Raccoon and Skunk Population Models for Urban Disease Control Planning in Ontario, Canada," *Ecological Applications* 11, no. 1 (2001). 301-302.

new one before it kills its present one. In light of this reality, it is indeed strange to claim that trapping actually spreads the disease. Here again, the animal protectionists play with the meanings of words. In blaming the sportsmen for transporting infected raccoons and causing the Mid-Atlantic rabies epidemic, the *COTW* insinuated that hunting and trapping caused the epidemic. The fact is, the hunters' desire to increase game numbers motivated them to relocate raccoons. But to suggest that hunting and trapping caused the epidemic carelessly confuses the motivation for an action with the action itself. The other claim, that trapping removes immune adult animals causing a reproductive spike of weaker and less immune animals,¹¹² also flies in the face of their complaint that trapping is indiscriminate. Either trapping is discriminate or indiscriminate. It takes a special and rare situation for a trapper to be able to set a trap that will only capture animals of a certain age. Finally, it should be noted that trapping by private individuals costs states nothing. In fact, trapping is a revenue generator as trappers pay the state for the privilege to trap animals. Therefore, the actions of private trappers can be reasonably claimed to reduce the incidence of rabies because trapping can reduce the overall population of a species in a given locale. Furthermore, these trappers do their work in a cost-effective manner.¹¹³

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As noted above, how one understands humanity's relationship to the planet will in large degree determine one's decision and evaluation of the evidence and goals regarding environmental policy. Few topics bring this fact into sharper review than the issue of wildlife management of which trapping plays a controversial part. But trapping cannot be ignored. Humans and animals compete over natural resources.¹¹⁴ The fact is, humans must kill to live, be it directly on one's own or through the use of surrogates. Becoming a vegan or vegetarian does not isolate one morally because clearing land and protecting crops causes harm to animals.

The thrust of this paper has been to help Christians recognize that the claims of animal protectionist groups, Christian or otherwise, need to be carefully evaluated. Whether or not readers find these explanations about the value of trapping convincing, the author hopes that it encourages environmentally cognizant Christians to think carefully about the complexities involved in wildlife management before backing any particular plan of action. The author suspects that most Christians, while not explicitly adopting animal protectionist ideology, have failed to properly consider the implications of adopting the hands-off view of creation espoused by animal protectionists. Perhaps, in their desire to correct

¹¹² Fox and Papouchis, "Refuting the Myths." 27.

¹¹³ This point cannot be over stated. Animal protectionists seem to prefer state-run wildlife programs. Christians must consider whether it is better to have tax dollars spent on wildlife control or on social programs for the poor.

¹¹⁴ Julien H. Franklin, *Animal Rights and Moral Philosophy* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2005). 89.

past failings, these Christians do not realize that they risk jettisoning not only an important Christian doctrine, namely, that God made the earth for humanity, not vice-versa,¹¹⁵ but also unduly restricting humanity's ability to extract renewable resources that wildlife provide. For example, one major Evangelical environmental group says that humans should avoid acting violently with the non-human creation.¹¹⁶ Regrettably, since they do not define what is meant by violence, uneducated Christians may think that trapping of animals under ecologically sustainable conditions is included.

While Scripture does not offer apodictic guidance on the use of wildlife, it does provide some helpful principles to consider when evaluating wildlife management policy. This writer believes Christians should accept our "dominion responsibilities."¹¹⁷ Animals, as all creation, belong ultimately to God. Haas says it well when he speaks of an order and purpose inherent in creation.¹¹⁸ Scripture and reason agree that there is something different about humans and animals that exceeds just higher intellectual ability. Whether the ontological claim is true or false, humans have authority over the animal kingdom. Privilege brings responsibility. In short, humanity is to treat God's property as God's property. This means that God's property is to be treated the way God wants it treated. To treat something above or below its station would be to make it an idol¹¹⁹ on the one hand, and worthless on the other. Scripture does appear to distinguish between domesticated animals (those directly under human control) and wildlife, while suggesting that human obligations are higher for domesticated animals.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, in spite of their higher status, domesticated animals may still be eaten.¹²¹

As for wildlife, humans have different obligations. The story of Noah exemplifies a key principle in sustainable ecology, namely that species matter more than individuals. God treated animals as groups but people as individuals and groups.¹²² The implication is that humans may kill animals but they should

¹¹⁵ Christian animal rights activists repeatedly assert that humans are to serve the earth. See Linzey and Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology*. 21.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Network, (accessed). While the site does not condemn trapping it does use the language of violence in an undefined way.

¹¹⁷ My position is remarkably similar to the concept of stewardship that Linzey assails in *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, (NY: Crossroad Publishing Co, 1987), 86ff. Except that I believe God does care about animal suffering but that the suffering is not a paramount concern. Perhaps creation groans because it realizes that its suffering does not glorify God where in the sinless Garden it did.

¹¹⁸ Guenther "Gene" Haas, "Creational Ethics Is Public Ethics," *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 12 (2007). 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.10

¹²⁰ See humanitarian concern for animal's needs in Mt. 12:11; Lk 13:15; 14:5

¹²¹ Gen 18:7; Lk 15:23; see Mk 2:22 on the use of animal skins & Acts 9:43.

¹²² The "you are more valuable than the sparrow" story of Mt. 10:29f/Lk 12:6ff underscores my point. God cares about the individual but in no way the same way as he cares about the individual human.

not exterminate species (see also Dt. 22:6). Scripture also clearly supports removal of wildlife posing threats to human interests and also for food (1 Sam 17:34-6; Lev 17:13).¹²³ Individual animals do not have a sacrosanct right to life, but species have the right to exist. Thus humans are to practice proper management of animal populations in their encounters with wildlife.

Second, animal activists have overstated the negative aspects of trapping. Christ's acceptance of fishing provides a useful rubric by which to investigate the issue of the treatment of wild animals and trapping. Animal activists contend that fishing is cruel because fish suffer during the capture process. Despite the pain fish underwent, Christ never condemned fishing.¹²⁴ In light of Christ's actions as the perfect second Adam, this writer would suggest that Christians have the God-given right to use those means to capture wild animals for food etc. that are economically efficient, while considering animal pain. In other words, if there was another economically feasible way to capture fish that caused less suffering for fish, Christ would have taken it. Therefore, Christians are permitted to not only eat animals, they may trap them provided the techniques employed properly balance the human need for efficiency with God's demand for us to respect His animal creation.¹²⁵

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¹²³ A. van Selms, "Hunting," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 782-3.

¹²⁴ I also think that Luke 15:27 "fatted calf" also provides some additional insight. If we look at Prov. 15:17 as the stall fed calf, isn't it possible that the fatted calf was a stall fed calf? While the calf certainly didn't suffer the degradations of the alleged actions of modern veal manufacturing, certainly the calf was treated a certain way to develop tender meat. See R.A. Stewart, "Cattle," in *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas and et.al. (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House, 1980). 255.

¹²⁵ Many thanks to my readers, Donna Vantassel, Claude Oleyar, Bryant White, Robert Schmidt, Calvin Smith, and the reviewer(s) their helpful comments.